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DEPT FOR CA/VO/F/P A. Rathweg and C. Kagarise,
EUR/SCE Brad Bell, and DS/IP/EUR

E.O. 12958:N/A

TAGS: [CVIS](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [HR](#)

SUBJECT: Croatian B1-B2 Visa Reciprocity Embassy Zagreb
Recommends Increase to 120 months

REF. (A) Zagreb 146 (B) Zagreb 129 (C) Zagreb 132

Sensitive but unclassified; please handle accordingly.

11. See action request, paragraph eight.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: Embassy Zagreb proposes increasing the current B1/B2 reciprocity of 60 months to 120 months for Croatian citizens. Post bases its recommendation on the steadily improving economy, post's low refusal rate (just over four percent) for Croatian B1/B2 applicants, and the positive results of our last two B1/B2 validation studies. As part of preparations for its future goal of EU and NATO membership, the

the GOC is showing steady progress in implementing necessary reforms on all fronts; and with the delivery of indicted war criminal, General Ante Gotovina, to the international war crimes tribunal at the Hague, post sees no major political obstacles to expanding visa reciprocity for Croatia at this time. With its consular workload growing in other areas, post would welcome the reduction in nonimmigrant workload that an increase in visa reciprocity would yield. Post RSO has been consulted and concurs in this recommendation. END SUMMARY.

13. (U) Croatian B/B2 visa applicants currently receive a maximum of 60 months visa validity and post's consular officers issue maximum validity in the majority of cases. Croatia's economy is steadily improving and unemployment is slowly, but steadily declining as the GOC implements wide-ranging economic reforms in preparation for joining the European Union. Croatia officially opened accession talks with the EU in October 2005, but reforms in all sectors of society have been well underway for the past few years, with significant progress more evident since the change of government in December 2003.

14. (U) The improvement in the economy has been reflected in Embassy Zagreb's declining adjusted refusal rate for Croatian B1/B2 applicants, which has remained at just over four percent for the last two fiscal years. What's more, NIV line officers' decisions to issue more B1/B2 visas have been validated by our last two B1/B2 validation studies. The latest study, (Ref B) in which 100% of the applicants were contacted, resulted in an overstay rate of only one percent, or three people out of the 373 applicants called.

15. (SBU) In addition to the concrete economic improvements and the evidence that Croatian travelers are not overstaying their visas in large numbers, Embassy Zagreb also believes that the political timing is right for an increase in visa reciprocity (see Ref A). For the past four years, the failure of the GOC to locate and deliver a prominent Croatian general to face war crimes charges at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in the Hague, has bedeviled Croatia's

relations with the U.S., as well as with members of the E.U. In light of the GOC's intensified cooperation with the Hague, culminating in the December 2005 capture of Gotovina and his delivery to the war crimes tribunal, we see no major political obstacle to expanding visa reciprocity with Croatia.

¶6. (SBU) As reported in Ref C, Embassy Zagreb's immigrant visa and American citizens consular workload is on the rise due to increased immigration of immediate relatives of Bosnian refugees, now U.S. citizens, in the United States, and to the rising popularity of Croatia as a "trend" destination for American tourists. The goal of handling our growing workload while maintaining high standards of customer service, public outreach, and management controls, will be harder to achieve in the future with our three-officer consular section. Given the improving economy, the low refusal rate and positive validation study results, it makes good management sense to expand Croatia's B1/B2 reciprocity to 120 months.

¶7. (U) American citizens may travel to Croatia for tourism or business trips without a visa for a three-month period within a six-month period.

¶8. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST: Post would appreciate favorable consideration of our proposal to increase visa reciprocity. It notes as well that A/S Harty's early March visit to Zagreb would be an excellent opportunity to announce such a change.

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